



Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative: Enabling Adolescents to Lead and Influence Advocacy

Thematic Brief





Competitive adolescent-led Participatory Action Research on Adolescent Reproductive & Sexual Health (ASRH) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in a rural region of Mali © Care Mali

Overview

Today's 1.2 billion adolescents make up approximately 16 percent of the world's population.¹ Despite making up 12 percent of the world's population, adolescent girls and young women aged 10 – 24 years often do not have a voice on issues affecting them.² In 2015, heads of state and governments around the globe adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a worldwide commitment to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustainable development goals whilst ensuring that *no one is left behind*.³ Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning. Whilst global policy frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provide for the right to participate in decision making that affects their lives, progress in engaging adolescents in shaping development efforts and in challenging harmful norms and values has been slow, and many adolescents are still unable to access the opportunities they require to achieve their dreams.⁴

¹ UNICEF. (2019). Adolescents' Overview. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/overview/>

² UNAIDS. (2014). *Adolescent Girls and Young Women*.
<https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2014/Adolescentgirlsandyoungwomen>

³ European Commission. (2017). *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs*.
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sustainable-development/SDGs/index_en.htm

⁴ International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). (2011). *Young People as Advocates*.
https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/web_young_people_as_advocates.pdf

How can the global education agenda leverage this “demographic dividend”⁵ to reflect adolescents’ needs, interests, and capabilities? What skills do adolescents need to contribute meaningfully to the social and economic development of their respective communities to challenge perceptions about their ability and right to contribute and to achieve their dreams?

This thematic brief will share experiences and promising practices from CARE’s Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI), a nearly two-decade multi-country initiative, focusing on how exercising voice and agency through adolescent-led advocacy under the initiative has helped marginalized girls to expand their life options as well as to improve their well-being and that of their peers. The brief will also explore how skills developed through adolescent leadership spaces have enabled girls to become elected leaders, to set advocacy agendas, to mobilize allies (teachers, parents, and other community members) and to act collectively to address issues that affect them within their communities.

CARE’s Approach to Advocacy in Education

In 2003, CARE USA launched the multi-country Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI), which sought to improve the lives of marginalized girls across the globe.⁶ PCTFI was designed with an emphasis on ensuring girls’ rights to education as well as supporting them to fulfil their greatest human potential. This initiative was implemented in countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America where millions of primary and secondary girls are out of school or at risk of dropping out. Over time, the evidence and knowledge gained from PCTFI has been used to inform CARE’s education advocacy effort to make a difference for ultra-marginalized girls (and boys).

CARE defines advocacy as a **deliberate process of influencing those who make decisions** about developing, changing, and implementing policies to reduce poverty and achieve social justice.⁷ Advocacy is a powerful and complementary tool to other strategies such as improving service delivery, building capacity among changemakers such as adolescents, and providing technical assistance to partner governments to deliver quality education and adolescent empowerment initiatives in various contexts. CARE recognizes advocacy as an important vehicle for achieving positive impact and lasting change. The interaction among programming, research, and advocacy works to generate and capture compelling evidence to support policy advocacy agendas at the local, regional, and global levels.⁸ Further, CARE contributes to deeper and sustainable impact by documenting successful models, advocating for the replication and expansion of proven approaches, promoting pro-poor solutions, convening and brokering linkages between key actors, and leveraging partnerships to influence powerholders at all levels to change policies and practices.⁹

Whilst the primary targets of CARE’s advocacy work in education are governments (as the primary duty-bearers with the responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of adolescents), our influencing also seeks to secure favorable positions, decisions, and actions by a wide range of other decisionmakers,

⁵ Ncube, M. (2018). “Africa: Harnessing the Demographic Dividend.” <https://www.herald.co.zw/africa-harnessing-the-demographic-dividend/>

⁶ CARE USA. (2014). *PCTFI Advocacy Workshop Report*, p. 2

⁷ Care International. (2014). *Global Advocacy Handbook*, p. 1

⁸ CARE USA. (2015). *Education Strategy (2015-2020)*, [CARE-Education-Strategy-2020-WEB.pdf](#)

⁹ CARE. [Summary-The Right to a Life Free from Violence.pdf \(care-international.org\)](#)

including parents, community leaders, civil society organizations, UN bodies, and the private sector. CARE completed its five-year strategy in 2020 and subsequently set a vision for 2030 with education as one of the three key pathways to reaching CARE's gender equality target of 50 million people. As part of this vision and its new education strategy (2022-2025), CARE will facilitate greater engagement of young people themselves in the provision of quality education services by building in more time and resources for advocacy, institutional partnerships, and systems strengthening.¹⁰

Under its third cohort (2015-2021), PCTFI provided an opportunity for CARE to test a Theory of Change (ToC) for adolescent empowerment through innovative designs and technical approaches and to take adaptive actions quickly using monitoring and evaluation findings. Using gender synchronized and transformative approaches, CARE's portfolio of education programs, including PCTFI, aims to identify and address the complex barriers which keep adolescents, especially girls, out of school or affect their ability to succeed while in school. These programs focus on education relevance and inclusiveness, quality, safe learning environments, and essential life skills needed to make informed life choices, to transition into higher levels of education or to self-/wage employment, and to challenge harmful social and gender norms.

Advocacy has a multiplier effect on adolescent empowerment by enabling adolescents to act on their capacities and competencies to influence changes in various spheres and to help powerholders recognize adolescent rights and to work with adolescents as valued change agents. Under PCTFI, the critical questions that emerged vis-a-vis advocacy included:

- What roles, if any, should adolescents, particularly girls and those from other excluded groups, play in education advocacy efforts?
- How are girls themselves working to amplify their individual and collective voices on issues which affect them?
- How are development actors such as CARE in the education sector strengthening adolescent girls' capabilities to achieve this?

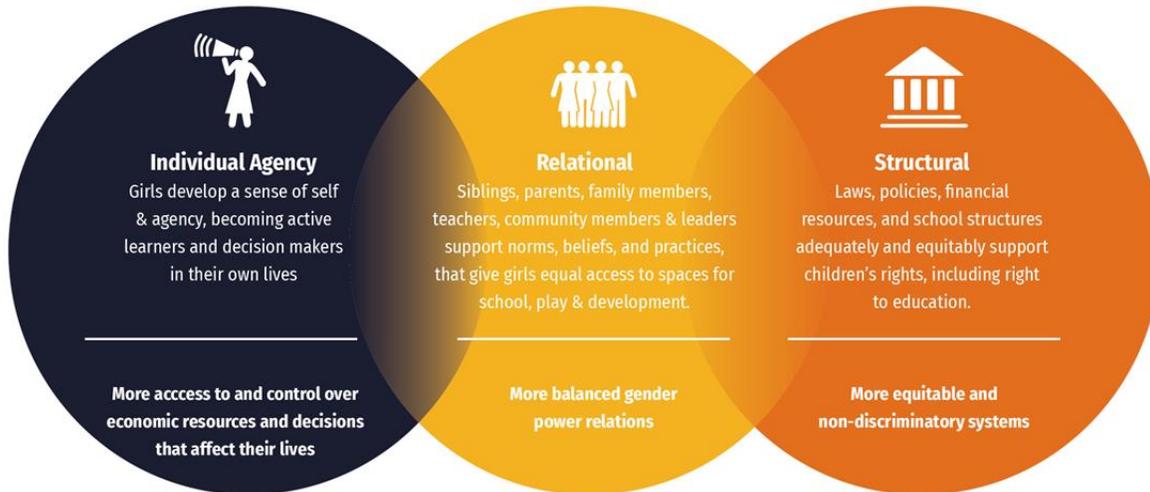
Engaging Adolescents in Advocacy

CARE's engagement of adolescents in advocacy is based on its Gender Equality Framework¹¹ as well as its Leadership Development Model (LDM).¹² Based on years of experience, CARE uses the Gender Equality Framework – a multi-dimensional approach to advancing gender equality – to prepare adolescents to take greater control of their lives by investing in a graduated empowerment process at three levels:

¹⁰ CARE USA. (2021). *Education and Adolescent Empowerment Strategy (2022-2025)*, <https://careinternational.sharepoint.com/sites/Global-Education-Hub/Shared Documents/About us/EAE Strategy FY 22-25-December 2021-Final.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=fk3JpC&cid=3a5f54c7-c4f1-40ef-9232-206dc539832a>

¹¹ CARE. (2019). *Gender Equality and Women's Voice Guidance Note*, https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/in-practice/GEWV/GEWV_guidance-note_english_2019.pdf

¹² CARE. (2012). *Girls' Leadership Development: Lessons from the Field*, <https://care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Girls-Leadership-Program-Brief-Final-Feb-2012.pdf>



CARE's Gender Equality Framework

- **Agency:** Adolescents analyze their lives and develop agency by gaining skills, confidence, assertiveness, and experience in different spheres, thus becoming agents of their own development.
- **Relations:** Adolescents form peer support networks among themselves and new relationships with other social actors, including at the school and community levels; they develop forums/coalitions as a pathway to claiming and realizing their rights.
- **Structures:** Adolescents (individually and collectively) challenge discriminatory norms, behaviors, and practices as well as the social order and accepted forms of power that shape their lives.

CARE works with adolescents to engage in advocacy on policies as well as programs which respond to their needs based on evidence gathered by the adolescents themselves as well as from implementation experience.

For over a decade, CARE has highlighted the need for **girl-led action** based on the investments the organization has made in developing girls' leadership skills as a core part of education and adolescent empowerment programming. Girls develop leadership competencies by gaining skills such as **voice** (belief in their right to have opinions as well as having the ability to form opinions and articulate them to their peers and others); **self-confidence** (belief in themselves and valuing their future aspirations); **decision making** (ability to make choices that shape their lives and influence their destinies); **organization** (ability to conceptualize ideas and see them through to reality) and **vision** (aspirations such as the ability to motivate themselves and others and to collaborate with others to achieve goals). Girls leverage and create opportunities to act on this newfound capacity and experience in different spheres to become the authors of their own empowerment. With support from nurturing adults within their environment (which often includes trained mentors, teachers, facilitators, and community leaders), they form peer support networks as well as new relationships with other social actors. Girls develop coalitions to become agents of change to challenge discriminatory norms, behaviors and practices, the established social order, and accepted forms of power that shape their lives as a pathway to claiming and realizing their rights.

Strategies for Adolescent-Led Advocacy

Based on CARE's programming experience and evidence, this section outlines some specific examples of strategies which can be employed to engage adolescents in advocacy:

Safe spaces for leadership development:

Leadership skills are an important foundation to enable adolescents to become engaged citizens as a step toward achieving their goals and building collective agency and peer support. Safe, girl-friendly peer support groups provide a platform through which girls and boys apply leadership competencies by identifying and addressing issues that concern them within their environment such as safety/ security, early marriage, equitable education access, and drop out and to work collectively to make their communities safer for and more supportive of growth opportunities for all children.

In **Nepal**, our work under PCTFI supported the formation and capacity building of **girls' collectives** – or leadership groups - reaching 2,700 girls in two rural districts as part of a five-year initiative aimed at increasing the life chances of marginalized adolescent girls through accelerated education and life skills development. The girls' collectives¹³ worked to reduce harmful social and gender norms preventing girls from making their own choices, including on education, behaviors to promote gender equality, actions against gender-based violence (GBV), menstrual hygiene management, and child marriage.

The girls' collectives in the two implementing districts came together to form **Girls' Rights Forums (GRFs)** -- girl-led networks which are registered through the relevant arm of government, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law, in Lumbini Province to ensure legitimacy and sustainability. Under the PCTFI-funded Maitri project in Nepal, 27 girls' collectives were nurtured, and another 32 girls' collectives were nurtured under another CARE project, Tipping Point – all of which are members of the Girls' Right Forums (GRFs).

The aim of the GRFs is to run different campaigns on girls' issues at the district and provincial levels for policy advocacy. GRFs draw their mandate from the girls' collectives and organize campaigns at the community level, advocate for their rights through policy dialogues and interactions with policy makers at regional and national levels, conduct home visits to encourage out-of-school girls to return to school, lobby for citizenship registration, and raise awareness on the challenges posed by GBV, sexual harassment, and child marriage in the community. For instance, the GRFs conducted policy dialogues in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu districts with stakeholders such as police, school management committee (SMC) members, parents, head teachers, teachers, and ward chairpersons, sharing issues on child marriage, education neglect, safety at school and within communities, and gender-based discrimination. To promote good governance, the GRFs also held annual general meetings which provided them with opportunities to share their achievements and actions with communities and local authorities as well as to enlist their support. Such platforms have enabled marginalized girls to exercise leadership as well as to inform and influence what community development issues are flagged and addressed that directly impact them.

The GRFs contributed to a letter to the Prime Minister of Nepal aimed at holding government accountable for the right to education as well as safe and secure education for girls. Representatives of 27 girls'

¹³ Girls' collectives are formed through a process of organizing marginalized adolescent girls who are socially excluded in ways which enable them to not only exercise their right to education but to also to raise their voices and act against harmful social norms and practices. Members of the girls' collectives are also engaged in other CARE activities.

collectives participated in two high level events in Lumbini province where they handed over a Memorandum to the Chief Minister that highlighted issues such as child marriage, access to education, and gender-based violence. On the same occasion the girls handed over petitions signed by 6,000 people to end child marriage to promote girls' education access and advancement. As a result, local government representatives and education officials committed to improving enabling environments for the girls in the schools as well as monitoring changes to support girl-friendly environments within schools.¹⁴ More specifically, school authorities made commitments and investments in support of the efforts of the girl-led networks, e.g., pledging to improve the safety and resourcing of the school environment and providing financial support to further sustain advocacy activities. Two girl-led networks received funding and support from CARE (under PCTFI) as well as from district stakeholders to strengthen their community activities as well as to continue to promote access to education for all learners and the reduction of child marriages and incidents of GBV and discrimination.¹⁵

In addition, the rural municipalities allocated financial resources (approximately USD3,520) to a total of 16 schools to support the provision and distribution of sanitary pads, placing of dustbins in the girls' toilets, and the provision of clean drinking water. During an interaction with members of the girls' collectives, the Chief of the Education Unit of rural municipalities made an on-the-spot decision to allocate approximately USD5,000 to each for the 16 schools within this municipality.¹⁶ This amount was earmarked for improving child- and disability-friendly as well as gender-responsive school infrastructure.

Similarly, in **India**,¹⁷ under Cohort 3, the PCTFI-funded Saksham project was designed to ensure that marginalized girls have access to safe and secure education that enables them to develop skills for improved life opportunities. This was done through strengthening girls' agency through girls' collectives. The collectives serve as safe spaces for girls to raise their voices to address school safety issues at various forums such as community meetings and awareness rallies, to provide one another with support, and to grow essential skills, conduct research and plan actions at local and national levels to address issues impacting them in the short- and long-term. Twenty girls' collectives¹⁸ were formed consisting of a total of 600 socially excluded and economically marginalized girls who were sensitized and trained on Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see more on PAR below), gender, and leadership skills to enable them to raise their voice to advocate for their rights. The girls' collectives:

- *identified key barriers* to education as well as key issues which affect their safety such as early marriage, child labour, domestic violence, gender discrimination, transportation issues and dropout
- *prioritised the issues* and *formulated action plans* to tackle the issues
- *carried out a variety of civic activities* to sensitize their communities on these issues, and
- *solicited support* from parents and the community to resolve identified issues.

As a result of the above, girls' collectives were able to raise their voices and exercise leadership on issues relating to safety and security such as eve-teasing and domestic violence. For instance, one of the

¹⁴ CARE Nepal. (2020). *Hausala Final Narrative Report*, p. 24

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 24

¹⁶ CARE Nepal. (2020). *Maitri Final Closeout Report*, p. 16

¹⁷ CARE's work in India also involves consolidating evidence-based policy analysis, learning, and action research to inform policy and guidelines on safe and secure education at the state and national levels. This includes informing the National Action Plan to operationalize the country's new National Education Policy.

¹⁸ Girls' collectives are formed through a process of organizing marginalized adolescent girls who are socially excluded in ways which enable them to not only exercise their right to education but to also to raise their voices and act against harmful social norms and practices. Members of the girls' collectives are also engaged in other CARE activities.

members of girls' collectives was able to register a case of domestic violence against her brother-in-law.¹⁹ Linkages between the girls' collectives and identified youth forums at local, state and national levels enabled cross sharing of learnings, collective action, and joint adolescent-led advocacy efforts around school safety.

Gender synchronized approaches - working with boys:

CARE places women and girls at the center of its work and sees gender equality as fundamental to its poverty reduction and social justice efforts. Using gender synchronized approaches, CARE's experience over the past two decades has demonstrated that achieving real and lasting progress towards gender equality requires proactive work with men and boys alongside women and girls.²⁰ While the examples given above mostly highlight leadership spaces for girls, the PCTFI Cohort 3 also worked with boys in peer groups in Mali, Kenya, Rwanda and Zimbabwe to build leadership competencies, challenge traditional gender norms affecting boys and girls, and address specific needs of adolescent boys.

For instance, in **Mali**, CARE implemented the Education for Change Project under the PCTFI Cohort 3. Boys comprised a significant proportion of the 25,031 adolescent leaders and agents of change (14,014 girls/11,017 boys) trained in 4,029 Friendship Circles (also referred to as "Amicales") and committed to positively influence social norms and local policies in their respective schools and communities in favor of adolescents' basic rights, especially for girls.²¹ The Friendship Circles were mainly student-led, with a teacher focal point in each school trained in how to help students run them, with an average of several dozen groups per school. The main reasons cited for joining the Friendship Circles included being welcomed into a group and welcomed by other group members (15.2%); having the opportunity to break out of isolation by joining a group made up of school friends (15.1%); taking advantage of the advice given during exchanges within the group (12.4%); taking advantage of group activities to meet fellow students (11.8%); and developing leadership through group activities (11.7%).²² Friendship Circles members became strong and experienced members of advocacy groups for girls' basic rights, including quality education, gender equity, (Sexual & Reproductive Health (SRH) rights, and against all forms of GBV. The project's endline report found that significantly higher proportion of girls (61%) compared to boys (38%) discussed sensitive topics such as SRH, girls' schooling, early marriage, and unwanted pregnancies with their parents. In addition, mothers highlighted the importance of adolescents belonging to a community group or association for social cohesion (70.4% of mothers), learning (53.8%), mutual aid and solidarity, and a space to exchange ideas and information (more than 40%).

In **Rwanda**, the project established 1,850 clubs (977 of girls and 873 of boys) that provided a platform to increase self-confidence, promote decision making, organization, and visioning skills (as well as skills in budgeting, saving and entrepreneurship). Recognizing that boys are the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse and other forms of violence against girls and the important role they may play in encouraging, helping, and advocating for girls in school, as well as in creating a safe school environment, the Safe Schools for Girls (SS4G) program engaged boys as well as girls in the mentoring and savings groups to help mobilize them to support girls, develop positive attitudes and behaviors around girls' empowerment, and to train them on issues related to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.²³ Through

¹⁹ CARE India Solutions for Sustainable Development. (2021). *PCTFI Saksham Final Report*, p. 4

²⁰ CARE International. (2014). *Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality Series: Stories of Engagement*, http://gender.careinternationalwikis.org/media/care_emb_brief_1_web_singlepages.pdf

²¹ CARE Mali. (2021). *PCTFI Cohort 3 Education for Change Project Final Report*, p. 3

²² CARE International au Mali. (2021). *Evaluation Finale du Projet Education for Change*, p. 65

²³ CARE Rwanda. (2021). *Endline Evaluation Report for the Safe Schools for Girls (SS4G) Project*, p. 23

joint activities around adolescent rights, gender and social norms, boys' and girls' clubs came together to promote more gender equitable attitudes at the school as well as at the household level. In addition, club activities also contributed to the improvement of the school environment (e.g., through advocating for gender sensitive toilets and girls' rooms equipped with water and sanitary products) as well as awareness raising around issues like learners' absenteeism, risks leading to drop out, and safety within schools and communities.²⁴ The SS4G endline evaluation found significant improvements in adolescents' self-confidence and that participation in a student or savings club helped participants over time to openly discuss challenges related to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.²⁵ The endline report recommended that student clubs should be maintained and that effort to help students to improve their leadership skills, voice their opinions, and reflect on their own choices should continue, as these activities can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors linked to improvements in educational outcomes.²⁶

Capacity and evidence building:

To prepare adolescent girls and boys for activism, interventions implemented by CARE include activities to build their capacity to understand the problems around them in order to better inform actions to address these issues and to engage in adolescent-led advocacy. CARE does this primarily by using three participatory community-based accountability approaches which allow for the meaningful engagement of adolescents: Participatory Action Research (PAR), Community Score Card (CSC), and Social Analysis and Action (SAA).

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The PAR process is done with the aims of analyzing girls' (and boys') situations and challenges within their respective communities, identifying challenges to education access, retention, and safety, and devising solutions. Learning how to collect and analyze data, to develop evidence-based interventions, and to explore these with other adolescents and adults in a variety of forums foster the development of collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, inter-personal, and leadership skills. Adolescents who undergo PAR training learn how to collect and analyze data on the barriers to their education, to share findings with community- and government-level influencers and powerholders, and to devise and monitor action plans to combat these barriers. Through the PAR process, adolescents also help to identify and prioritize issues affecting them including restrictions on girls' mobility due to safety issues within communities, sexual harassment, violent behavior and discrimination against women and girls, restricting girls from continuing their education.

Under PCTFI Cohort 1, CARE implemented the RENACER project in two regions of **Honduras** (one peri-urban, one rural) by engaging adolescents and youths to turn around their communities that were plagued by gang violence, poor education outcomes, lack of parental support for education, and teenage pregnancies. Adolescents and youths underwent training after which they conducted a community census to gain greater understanding of the challenges facing their peers using PAR tools, including conducting risk assessments and developing risk maps.²⁷ They catalyzed communal action planning to address local

²⁴ CARE USA. (2021). *PCTFI Leadership and Life Skills Thematic Brief*

²⁵ CARE Honduras. (2015). *Final Report of the PCTFI RENACER Initiative PCTFI Cohort 1*, p. 46

²⁶ Ibid, p. 46

²⁷ Moll, A. & L. Renault. (2014). "Rebirth, empowerment, and youth teaching social change." *Gender & Development, Vol. 22 (1)*, 35-36

risks. As a result, adolescents and youth assisted in the establishment of a government-approved accelerated learning program which involved activities such as facilitating awareness raising events, identifying learning centers, finding facilitators, and mentoring and counseling at-risk adolescents; conducting home visits to identify and support out-of-school children and motivating their out-of-school peers to enroll for the program.²⁸ Adolescents and youth also conducted grassroots advocacy which resulted in an increase in the budget allocation for education.²⁹ The project incorporated girls as agents of positive leadership in their communities through their participation in arts and sports groups. In addition, the initiative mobilized 864 girls organized into 73 interest groups to implement extracurricular activities to strengthen their leadership skills in their communities with the support of 12 community mentors.³⁰ This opportunity enabled communities to understand the importance of valuing equal opportunities for girls in the same way as boys. Local authorities changed their thought patterns and incorporated youth in the process of community decision-making through their representation in school organizations and decision-making bodies. Communities assumed direct responsibility for monitoring children and youth so that they were able to finish their basic education studies.³¹

One of the major lessons learnt from the RENACER project was that given the opportunity and appropriate guidance, young people are able to organize themselves and influence their peers to make personal and collective decisions in favor of the development of their communities.³² The participation of young people in evidence building through conducting a census enabled them to interpret their own reality and to take action, thus highlighting the strengths and abilities of girls and boys in community development efforts to their parents and community leaders.

In **India**, under Cohort 3, eighteen of the 20 girls' collectives under the Saksham project were trained on PAR to identify challenges to education access, retention, and safety and to seek solutions. Through the PAR process, girls' collectives identified barriers hampering their access to and continuation of their education. Their actions included engaging with communities and powerholders in villages, taking social actions (such as rallies and interactions with parents), building an evidence database on causes and consequences of safety and security challenges, and connecting with and mobilizing stakeholders at the local and national levels to increase accountability towards safe and secure education for girls (and boys). Girls also led role plays, rallies, and signature campaigns on gender equality and gender-based violence, going back to school, voter awareness and COVID-19 awareness programs. According to the Saksham project's endline report, selected members of the 12 girls' collectives sampled for the endline survey participated in Youth Forums in order to take up their issues at the state and national levels and to seek solutions. For instance, during a state level Youth Forum, members of the girls' collectives were able to present critical issues affecting them including child/early marriage, gender discrimination, eve-teasing, gender-based violence, dropout and child labour. However, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the girls' collectives' ability to organize and participate in all the planned activities due to field level mobility restrictions as well as digital challenges (lack of mobile devices, no money for data charges and poor connectivity). A key recommendation highlighted in the report was that more work is needed around networking with Youth Forums in different states of India, networking with politicians, and engaging with system functionaries to build a strong multi-level coalition of support around girls' education.³³

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 37-39

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 41-42

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 43-44

³¹ CARE Honduras. (2015). *Final Report of the PCTFI RENACER Initiative PCTFI Cohort 1*, p. 46

³² Ibid, p. 46

³³ CARE India Solutions for Sustainable Development. (2021). *Endline Evaluation Report of Saksham Girls Education Project*, p. 38

In **Nepal**, under the Maitri project the girls' collectives worked to reduce harmful social and gender norms preventing girls from making choices in their lives, including on education, behaviors to promote gender equality, GBV prevention, and child marriage. To prepare them for this role, girls' collectives were capacitated to analyze girls' situations and challenges within their respective communities. The evidence from this PAR process informed girl-led actions to address the issues they identified and analyzed. When the girls' collectives conducted surveys in their villages, they found that many girls are out of school, they are getting married early, and they do not have vital registration documents such as citizenship certificate (that would improve access to education and other critical services). As a result of the survey findings, they were able to facilitate 98 adolescent girls to go back to school, 174 adolescent girls were processed for citizenship, and 52 adolescent girls' marriages were postponed. Girls' collectives also conducted rallies to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence through their own initiation, planning, and implementation for community awareness efforts on GBV.³⁴

Community Score Card (CSC)

CSC is a proven citizen-driven approach which provides a platform for structured interface between stakeholders to increase participation, accountability, and transparency between communities and decision makers. Through an adaptation of the Community (Participatory) Score Card (CSC) approach under Cohort 3, CARE brought together adolescents, parents, teachers, school administrators, local government officials and other service providers to jointly analyze problems and find shared solutions related to education service delivery at the secondary school level.

In **Zimbabwe**, CARE adapted the CSC approach in order to ensure that the process was relevant and appropriate to the school context. These adaptations included changing the name of the approach to Participatory Score Card (PSC)³⁵ One of the objectives of conducting PSC sessions in schools was to identify barriers to adolescent girls' and boys' access to lifelong learning. PSC implementation provided a platform for adolescents to apply leadership competencies of voice/assertiveness, decision making, and visioning, and enabled them to identify problems and solutions related to quality of education. The PSC sessions conducted in schools afforded an opportunity for the communities and schools to share solutions to challenges such as absenteeism and dropping out of school.³⁶ As a result, parents, school authorities, learners and communities collectively identified issues negatively affecting educational achievement of children and how to resolve these locally.

PSC activities also led to actions being taken at the school level to address learners' needs such as increased support for menstrual hygiene management. Learners highlighted a lack of emergency menstrual hygiene sanitary ware within their schools. In addition, disposal of menstrual waste was another challenge which affected their learning during their menstrual cycles resulting in increased absenteeism amongst girls. Adolescents advocated for the school authorities to provide emergency kits for use during menstrual periods as well as the construction of disposal facilities for menstrual waste. For instance, an incinerator was built at the Young Africa School in June 2018 as part of the PSC action plan. Learners produced an advocacy paper on issues revolving around adolescent Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). The

³⁴ CARE Nepal (2021). *Maitri Phase II End of Project Report*, p. 2

³⁵ CARE Zimbabwe (2020). *PCTFI Zimbabwe Final Narrative Report* p. 43

³⁶ CARE Zimbabwe (2021). *PCTFI Zimbabwe Endline Evaluation Report*, p. 29

paper was presented to teachers, headmasters from project schools, and members of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE)'s District and Provincial teams, the National AIDS Council (NAC), Shanduko Trust, Childline, Zimbabwe Republic Police Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) department as well as the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC). As a result of the advocacy paper, learners managed to raise issues they identified that needed urgent attention for menstrual hygiene such as the need for pain killers during the menstrual cycle, the need for sanitary ware to use when the menses start during the school week, and the need for good washing facilities and incinerators at schools. Learners were then given the platform to air their views and to express their feelings thereby demonstrating voice, confidence, and assertiveness.

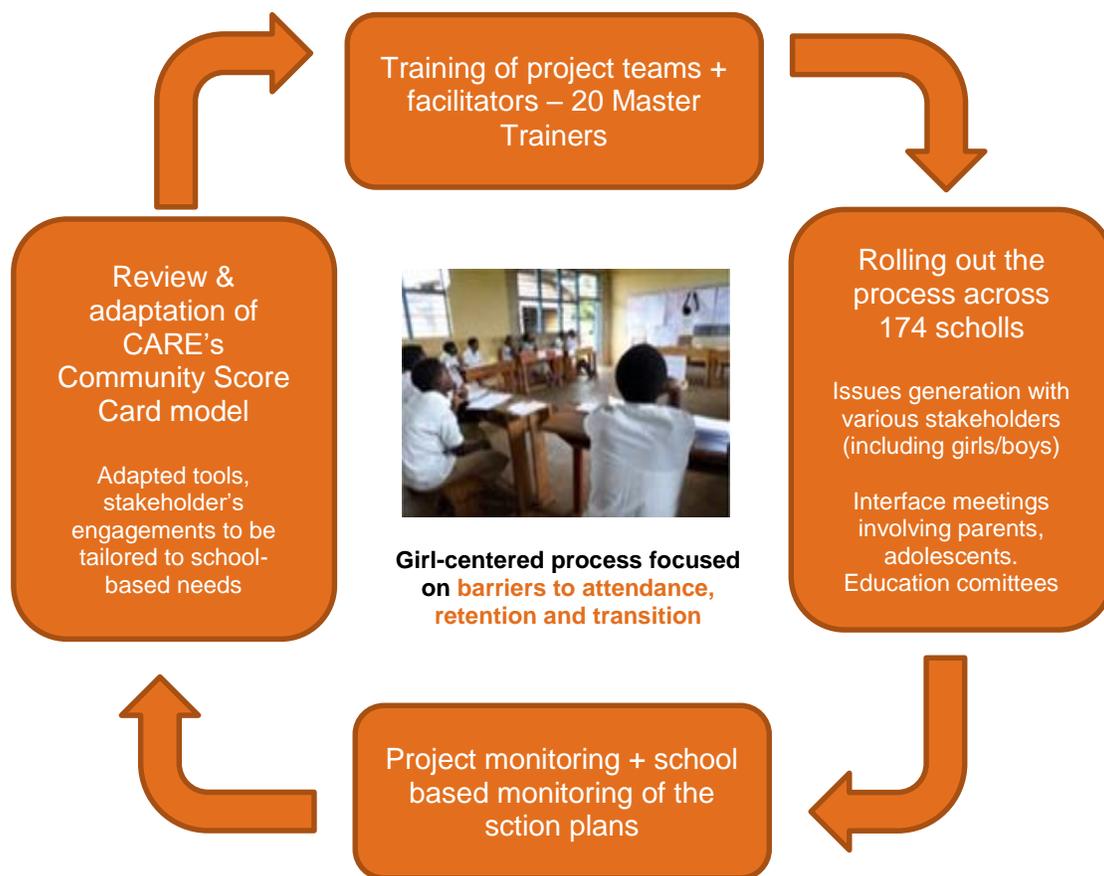
Additionally, the PSC platform brought together education officials from the MoPSE, school authorities, teachers, parents, and learners to identify and discuss issues that affect learning outcomes, and both boy and girl adolescents have gained confidence and improved their sense of self-worth and voice on issues related to education quality and access.³⁷ One key finding from the project's endline evaluation noted that mean leadership scores between the baseline and endline improved more in schools implementing PSC activities (PSC schools) compared to schools which were not implementing PSC activities, indicating that PSC activities are crucial for leadership development.³⁸

In **Rwanda**, CARE adapted the Community Score Card (CSC) methodology (see Fig.1 below) to bring together school stakeholders to identify gaps in school/program sexual and reproductive gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response.³⁹ The score card was also used to bring together students, teachers, and school leaders to assess the level of girl-friendliness of schools and to identify potential solutions to address the lack of adequate sanitation facilities in schools (particularly for dignified menstrual hygiene management), thereby empowering girls to voice and address their concerns. The adaptations to this approach for the school context included ensuring buy-in of the score card by the school and local authorities as an accountability and feedback mechanism, ensuring that the CSC process did not interfere with classroom time (and with that a loss of instructional time), and ensuring that the CSC platform was a safe space for girls (and boys) to identify issues affecting them and to be able to provide feedback without intimidation.

³⁷ CARE International in Zimbabwe. (2020). *Empowering Adolescents for Lifelong Learning: Leadership Journey*

³⁸ CARE Zimbabwe. (2021) *PCTFI Zimbabwe Endline Evaluation Report*, p. 30

³⁹ CARE Rwanda. (2021). *PCTFI Safe Schools for Girls (SS4G) Endline Evaluation Report*, p. 7



Adaptation of the Community Score Card for the PCTFI Safe Schools for Girls Project in Rwanda⁴⁰

As evidenced from the above examples, the use of CSC gave adolescents a forum to voice their concerns and to define the issues they encountered in accessing high-quality education and SRH information. As a direct result of the CSC work, schools provided girls rooms equipped with free sanitary towels, separated toilets for boy and girls, and operationalizing a code of conduct for teachers, among others key actions.⁴¹ The CSC has served as a promising entry point for adolescent-led advocacy, enabling young people, including those most at risk, to influence decision makers towards a policy direction to retain girls and boys in school and to foster accountability among decision makers, local officials, parents and students towards good governance practices that foster a safe and more inclusive learning environment.

Social Analysis and Action (SAA)

Social Analysis and Action (SAA) is a facilitated process where individuals and communities explore and challenge social and cultural norms, beliefs, and practices that shape their lives. It involves participatory reflections that explore and challenge social factors that negatively impact individual lives and well-being with the goal of creating a more gender equitable and enabling environment for the community. SAA reinforces both the voice and agency of individuals using community discussions on social norms and equity issues as part of that process.

In **Kenya**, the project adapted CARE's SAA approach to enable adolescents and parents to identify,

⁴⁰ CARE Rwanda. (2021). *PCTFI Safe Schools for Girls End of Project Report*, p. 8

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 8

analyze and critically reflect on social and gender norms negatively affecting girls' education and opportunities. SAA for adolescents provided a safe space for adolescents to dialogue on harmful sociocultural practices they encounter in their lives, after which they identified and implemented actions to address these concerns. Through SAA activities, adolescents were able to practice critical thinking skills, build their self-confidence, and exercise various leadership competencies, particularly voice, decision-making, and organization when planning actions.

Setting the Advocacy Agenda:

The evidence gathered by the adolescents from the PAR, CSC and other evidence building processes such as SAA has been used to inform the context-specific advocacy agenda around education and adolescent empowerment in the countries implementing the PCTFI initiative.

For instance, in **Zimbabwe**, the advocacy agenda centered on influencing the implementation of adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health policies within a peri-urban context. In **Nepal**, the advocacy goal was to advocate for positive attitudes and effective support mechanisms at the community, national and regional levels on issues related to safe and secure education for Dalit, Muslim, and other marginalized girls. In **Rwanda**, the advocacy agenda was designed to support the provision of adolescent-friendly ASRH and financial literacy education as well as to create spaces for adolescent-led accountability and advocacy approaches. In **Kenya**, the advocacy agenda was in part aimed at informing and influencing partner programming and parental as well as community support for adolescent-centered approaches to economic empowerment, financial literacy, and ASRH. In **Mali**, the goal of the advocacy effort was to influence both leaders and adolescents to speak out against child marriage and for communities to put in place mechanisms to hold those who marry children accountable. In **India**, the advocacy goal was to influence the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 Plan of Action to have provisions that ensure appropriate measures are put in place to promote safe and secure education for girls.

Girl-led Action:

The combination of adolescent girls acquiring or enhancing leadership skills, participating in girl-friendly spaces, gathering, and analyzing evidence of the challenges before them, and setting an agenda has provided fertile ground for girl-led actions such as rallies, interactions with parents and school leadership, and engagement with local/national education officials through girls' dialogues, presentations, and calls for action. The following section highlights specific examples of actions initiated by and/or led by adolescent girls, the results of which have been elaborated on and synthesized into other sections of this brief.

In **Zimbabwe**, girls participated in School Development Committee meetings in order to address menstrual hygiene management (MHM) issues. In **Nepal**, local chapters of CARE's advocacy partner – National Campaign for Education (NCE), a coalition of 339 actors in the education sector – worked with adolescents to engage local leaders through policy dialogues at the district and national levels. In **India**, girl-led actions included engaging with communities and powerholders in villages, taking social actions, and building an evidence database on causes and consequences of safety and security challenges. All these actions were designed to inform as well as to influence national education policies and school safety protocols and helped to mobilize stakeholders at local and national levels to take greater accountability for the provision of safe and secure education. Girls' collectives in **India** also embarked on self-initiated activities as part of communities' responses to COVID-19. Such initiatives included developing information, education, and communication (IEC) materials to disseminate vital COVID-19 prevention information while following all precautionary guidelines set by the Government of India using modalities such as door-to-door contact and

developing and pasting posters on the backs of their houses and those of their neighbors. In **Mali**, an online communication tool(m-platform) and the use of text messaging (with guidance on how to engage responsibly and safely online) enhanced adolescents to participation in friendship groups. The groups consisted of at least 10 members trained on topics such as ASRH, gender-based violence, and DRR and charged with holding short meetings as well as replying to SMS messages they received from the project participants, with technical support from trained focal point teachers.

Enabling Factors for Adolescent-Led Advocacy

Based on CARE's experiences of implementing adolescent-led advocacy, this section provides ideas about what other actors should consider when designing, implementing, measuring and/or scaling adolescent-led advocacy approaches.

Design and implementation:

Projects which target adolescents should **deliberately incorporate an adolescent-led advocacy agenda from the start** and ensure that adolescent girls and boys themselves are consulted at critical stages throughout the project cycle. As highlighted in earlier sections, CARE has adapted approaches such as the Community Score Card and Social Analysis and Action in order to create platforms that enable the meaningful engagement of adolescents. In addition, CARE also uses other tools such drawings, photo-voice, short videos, and social media platforms to enable adolescents to share their thoughts and experiences in a non-threatening way.

Throughout implementation, critical competencies such as voice, agency, decision making, organizing, and visioning need to be developed among adolescent girls and boys, and spaces need to be created to enable girls in particular to practice applying and deepening them. In addition, **partnerships including funding and capacity building with other influencers such as local youth groups and networks** as well as relevant government agencies should be pursued and strengthened in order to address the root causes of poor education outcomes, absenteeism, irregular attendance and drop out as well as to promote systemic changes. Grassroots support and partnerships with champions, allies, and role models are especially important when advocating for open discussions and addressing taboo topics such as ASRH.

Adolescent-led advocacy should be viewed as a graduated process with inter-connected steps which help adolescents to build their capacity to influence issues which truly matter to them and have an impact on the achievement of their life ambitions. Adequate time also needs to be taken into consideration to effect changes at the individual, relational, and structural levels. This will help address concerns that adolescent-led advocacy tends to be tokenistic, i.e., involving adolescents in advocacy in ways which do not ensure meaningful participation and engagement.

For CARE, child protection and safeguarding issues are very important, i.e., the interests of the child are to be protected over any consideration including over any advocacy for children's rights.⁴² In following CARE's Child Protection and Do No Harm approach, CARE analyzes and mitigates against any potential harm that could come to adolescents participating in ALA to put child protection first, as this is more important than potential benefits of adolescents engaging in ALA.

⁴² CARE USA. (2005). *Guidelines for Involving Children in Advocacy and Public Relations*

Measurement:

Evidence-based advocacy is a process based on independent data from different sources, wherein needs are assessed to identify gaps in policy and practice and to advocate for changes which result in positive education outcomes and increased agency for adolescents.⁴³ CARE's global education indicators include an indicator related to girl-led advocacy, measuring the percentage (%) of girls in girl-led advocacy to address issues affecting girls and adolescents. This reflects an understanding of the critical roles girl adolescents can play in their own empowerment by being provided with opportunities to develop and exercise critical skills that enable them to participate in and contribute to the world around them.

CARE's experiences across the PCTFI implementing countries have found that involving adolescents in gathering as well as engaging with data (e.g., through Participatory Action Research, Participatory (school-based) Score Card and Social Analysis and Action) is important not only for setting an adolescent-led advocacy agenda but also for sustaining adolescent-led action. Training adolescents to engage with data and to develop higher level skills also help to build a pipeline of strong leaders equipped with the relevant and appropriate skills to influence the ecosystem around them as well as to decide what success will look like for themselves and others. For instance, in Honduras, youth who were trained to gather, analyze and use data to influence and engage powerholders subsequently volunteered as accelerated education program learning facilitators. They identified at-risk learners, conducted home visits to support retention, and collaborated with families on how to mitigate dropout risks. They also worked with local authorities to ensure safe learning spaces were built. Similarly, in India and Nepal, girls were trained to collect data on issues affecting themselves and their peers in their respective communities and to use this to inform girl-led actions such as rallies, campaigns, and efforts related to school safety and security with local and national authorities.

Key contacts:

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⁴³ United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). *Evidence Based Advocacy for Gender in Education: A Learning Guide*, [A learning guide. Evidence-based advocacy for gender in education | Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)

Annex

Quick Guide to Developing an Adolescent-Led Advocacy Agenda

Based on CARE's experiences of working with others to support meaningful adolescent engagement in influencing policy and practice in communities, the following guidelines provide a starting point for you as adolescents (together with your adult supporters such as mentors or educators) to take the lead in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an advocacy agenda focused on addressing the challenges faced by you and your peers in your school and/or community.

Getting Together – Organizing ourselves as adolescents

- How are we as adolescents organized in our community? What structures or activities bring us together on a regular basis, e.g., school, church, community theatre, social sport, music groups?
- Are adolescents of all sexes and gender identities free to participate in these structures and activities?
- Are there any groups of adolescents who are clearly marginalized or socially excluded in our community because of age, in-school or out-school status, employment status, geographical location, marital status, religious background etc.? How can we encourage them to also participate?
- Are these structures and activities friendly for adolescents with different needs, e.g., disabled adolescents; adolescent mothers; ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, etc.? If not, how can we work with others to make sure that their needs are also met?

Agency and Voice – Preparing ourselves to lead positive change in our community

- Which skills do we need in order to lead and contribute to positive change in our community? Examples may include research and evidence building, setting an agenda, public speaking and engaging with others, forming peer support networks, etc.
- Which of these skills do we already have amongst ourselves and our peers? Which skills are missing? This can be determined by making a list of all the skills which we individually and collectively have and those that we need but do not currently have.
- Are there any activities or programs or organisations in our community or elsewhere which can help us as adolescents to gain new skills or strengthen skills which we already have?
- As adolescents, what are some of our key strengths and weaknesses (this refers to us as individuals and as a group) examples of strengths include high levels of energy, new and fresh ideas and being knowledgeable about new technologies. Examples of weakness could include a lack of resources and a lack of self-confidence?
- What could be some of the opportunities and threats (this refers to the external environment). An example could be some upcoming events on a community calendar which we can take advantage of as we plan our own activities. An example of a threat could be extreme events such as Covid19 or a cyclone or political violence.
- Are there any opportunities for adolescents to work with positive local female or male role models as well as other youth advocates? If none or few exist, who else can we speak to in order to build these relationships?

Agenda Setting – Understanding the challenges which we are facing as adolescents in our community

- What are some of our hopes, dreams and aspirations as adolescents?
- What factors will help us to achieve these hopes, dreams and aspirations? What factors will act as barriers?
- What are the issues affecting adolescents in our community? Such issues may include teen pregnancy and childbirth, early forced and child marriage, mental health, violence and alcohol/substance abuse.
- Which groups of adolescents are affected by the above-mentioned challenges?

Evidence Building – Gathering information about the challenges affecting adolescents

- How do we know that the above-mentioned challenges exist within our community? What evidence is available to confirm that these challenges really exist?
- Do we need to collect more data/information on these challenges?
- Can we collect this data and information ourselves? If so, do we have the skills, tools, time and other resources needed to collect this additional data and information ourselves? Do we need other people to help us? How can/will we use this additional data and information to help us to understand the challenges which adolescents are facing in our community?
- Do you know of any policies and practices which support adolescents to achieve their aspirations?

Planning – Preparing an Action Plan for our advocacy activities

- Based on the challenges we have identified above, which ones are the most important ones to us (let us consider the top 3 challenges)? Why are these the most important ones?
- What is the overall change that we want to see, lead, and influence in our community in order to make the lives of adolescents better (which is our advocacy goal)?
- Who are we trying to influence? Who will help us to achieve this change? Who may stand in our way as we try to achieve this change?
- What activities do we need to implement in order to achieve this change? What resources are required (time, finances, people etc.)?

Let's Act! – Working together to influence positive change

- Who will be responsible for each activity and within what timeline?
- Are there any upcoming events in our community which we can take advantage of in order to implement our advocacy activities?
- Who can we work with and partner with?

- How can we work with other adolescents working on the same issues

Review & Monitor – Tracking progress and results

- How will we know that our activities are helping us to work towards the positive change we want to see in our communities for adolescents?
- How will we know that we have succeeded in making a positive change?
- How will we record these positive changes and how will we let others know about them?



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